Abstract

This poster highlights the results of student projects during the fall semester of 2012 (ANTH 4202/9202). A total of nine students participated in the course, seven undergraduates and two graduate students. The course was designed as an experiential, active and engaged learning experience with several challenging projects to complete throughout the semester. Students from a variety of majors including art, anthropology, sustainable tourism, psychology, and communications completed course projects that combined cultural anthropology and a variety of technologies. Over the semester, students created a composite view of the diverse communities of Greenville. Students portrayed aspects of culture by "telling a story" through postcards, photos, and films. The products of those projects were used to communicate the students findings not only to the university community, but to the larger Greenville community as well.

Introduction

Through participation in the course, students discovered that Greenville has a rich variety of people. Students went out of the classroom and interacted with community members through interviews, observations, photo documentation, and filming. Students saw firsthand that community members contribute productively to society in a myriad of ways and that successful leaders must develop the ability to observe thoughtfully and to understand the communities in which they work. Students learned numerous skills by leaving their comfort zones and interacting with people from different, and unfamiliar, segments of the Greenville area. Students detailed, evaluated, analyzed, and finally represented their findings to the community through photos and film.

The sub-discipline of visual anthropology is premised on the belief that other cultures can be understood and represented through the visual symbols that they use, based on an analysis derived from long term participant/observation of a select group of people. Photographs and film of other cultures have a seemingly objective explanatory power that masks the subjectivity implicit in their making. Students learned a variety of interacting, recording, and listening skills by completing several projects throughout the semester. Through the use of digital photography and film, students learned to recognize the different cultural lenses through which they and the groups in their communities perceive reality; they saw more clearly the culturally significant aspects of these communities, and envisioned innovative/creative enhancements.

First Hand Ethnographic Skills

Each student identified an existing population within the Greenville area to document throughout the semester. Next, the students completed the IRB modules along with a classroom IRB to conduct student research; they created a consent form, and gained an understanding of the ethics for modules along with a classroom IRB to conduct student research; they created a consent form, and gained an understanding of the ethics for participating in the research. Students then networked with their selected communities to gain access of the information that they gathered from their communities.

The second set of assignments that students completed involved the use of photography in documenting and understanding culture. Students captured various aspects of culture and daily life using several forms of photography, including photo documentation, photo elicitation, and photo voice methods. They documented the occupational to the mundane. These included cultural events such as drag shows, farming techniques, religious services and grocery shopping. Students asked community participants to explain the significance of what they were doing, how it relates to culture, and how it relates to identity (individual, community, national, etc.). Using these methods, students were able to gain a great number of insights into their communities by collecting photographs of community members in action. Along with describing in text what participants did, students showed their participants active in their given communities. Students created, organized, advertised, and installed a photo exhibition. In addition, each student was responsible for advertising through news sources, flyers, and other publicity announcements for the event. Photos are on display at both the Tippy Teapot in downtown Greenville as well as in the Joyner Library on main campus of ECU. The organized and held a photo exhibition opening at the Tippy Teapot. It was attended by more than 100 people including faculty, students, and community members. Both exhibits will travel in January. The display at the Tippy Teapot will move to the Swindle and the display at the Joyner Library will move to the BB&T branch office on Evans Street. Students also displayed their photos in their individual blogs in the form of a narrated PowerPoint slideshow. This final project of the photography assignments involved students entering their photos, one monthly, in the My Shot photo competition to National Geographic. If selected, the photo would be published in the monthly magazine.

The third section of the course was dedicated to learning field methods in ethnographic film documentation. Students needed to portray aspects of culture by "telling a story" to the viewer. This story demonstrates the rationale for understanding the life and the world around them. This viewpoint could be cultural. If selected, the photo would be published in the monthly magazine. The products of those projects were used to communicate the students findings not only to the university community, but to the larger Greenville community as well.

The Assignments

Each student completed his or her final project by working closely with me throughout the editing process. We had one in class screening and two individual screenings in order to prepare for our final project film festival. The film festival was held on Thursday, December 13, 2012 from 6:30 – 9:30 in Flanagan 285. Each film showed and represented a vastly different segment of the population, yet viewers could recognize their commonalities. Students called their project "Threads of Diversity" as a way to recognize that despite our differences people, whatever they are and wherever they live, have the same kinds of hopes, wishes, and desires that ultimately connect us all as humans. The films were presented to faculty, staff, students, and family and community members. A total of 40 people attended the event. We were very pleased with the number of participants, considering the event was held on the last day of finals week and in the evening.

Summary

Students in this class did not simply write a paper for their professor at the end of the semester. They exposed themselves and their work to a large audience for feedback, comments, and criticism. This takes bravery and effort beyond the boundaries of the classroom. During the film festival, each student introduced his or her film project, showed it on her film, and then answered questions from the audience. Students met the challenges of creating, presenting, and explaining each of their film projects to viewers. The participation of the final project film festival clearly helped them to build confidence on several levels by defending their work. The ability to defend one’s work is an important skill of a good leader. The film festival was an excellent ending to the fifteen weeks that we shared exploring our community together as a group of visual anthropologists. Students gained skills that they can apply to real world situations because they possess a new way of knowing, observing, analyzing, and interacting with others. This will most certainly allow them to become successful leaders in the future.

By all accounts, this was an extremely successful class that the Department of Anthropology fully supports and would like to have taught on a regular basis. Should this class be added to the regular course offerings of Anthropology, it will become very popular. I believe that combining theoretical concepts with experiential opportunities enhanced the learning process that challenged students to rise to the demands of the class. Students had several new arts, methods, and theories to learn, but despite that, they completed their projects with success and enthusiasm. Since the class size was small, students received individualized attention that facilitated their success. I need to emphasize that this has been an amazing experience for me and my students.

Teaching Cultural Diversity Through Visual Anthropology Field Methods

Dr. Luci M. Fernandes, Department of Anthropology  www.ecu.edu/anth/luci-fernandes.cfm

Students interacted with people whom they did not know. They needed to find a way to bridge the gap between cultural differences and get people to open up and explain their distinctive point of view. They learned the importance of building trust with community members. Students experienced and witnessed a different way of life and through the assignments, documented that way of life. Students then needed to share what they had collected with others in a way that connects people for greater understanding. Students audio recorded their interviews and created podcasts, combining questions and responses with narration. Their podcasts were based on the style of The American Life. Students posted their podcasts on their individual Blog pages.

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